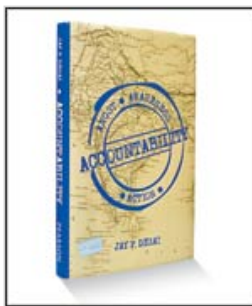


## Called to account

Book review: Accountability Angst Awareness Action

Shweta Punj Edition: Aug 5, 2012

**TAGS:** Accountability: Angst Awareness Action | Jay P. Desai | Pearson



### ***Accountability: Angst Awareness Action***

By Jay P. Desai

Pearson

**Pages:** 193

**Price:** Rs 500

The timing of this book could not have been better, given the current yawning governance deficit in the country. Author Jay Desai analyses the concept of accountability: how it arose in India, whether it can be measured, how strong our existing accountability mechanisms are at present, and so forth. Though heavily academic, rife with historical references and a socio-economic perspective, this is also a deft and precise work.

Desai says the concept of accountability has been ingrained in India's political system right from the Vedic Age, when the king used to be accountable for his decisions to the 'Sabha' or the 'Samiti', whose modern-day equivalent would be the Lok Sabha. Coming to the present, he delves into the accountability mechanisms that govern the legislature, executive and judiciary, closely examining institutions like the Comptroller and Auditor General of India, and offering suggestions on how to make them more effective.

There is ample research and statistical analysis, but the writing does tend to get cumbersome and tedious at times. The arguments offered and suggestions provided to enforce greater accountability also come across as somewhat theoretical. Perhaps this is because the author, a management consultant, has spent much of his working life interacting with the corporate sector rather than politicians. In any case finding solutions to an endemic problem like governance deficit is a daunting task.

The author's 'correlation analysis' offers a refreshing perspective on impact of socio-economic factors such as per capita income, social individualism and social hierarchies, on the quality of governance. It is particularly fascinating to find that factors such as voter turnout in elections, social diversity within a country, or the size of a country's population have a weak correlation with governance. Desai identifies four 'foundations' of accountability: appropriate representation, participative conduct, legitimate conduct and liability enforcement. He also identifies the six 'I's or inadequacies which undermine these four foundations: inadequate information, inadequate impartiality, inadequate implementation, inadequate infrastructure, inadequate independence and inadequate involvement. He goes on to suggest ways in which the six 'I's can be reduced.

But some of the ideas he suggests such as creating a centralised, single platform source of information on all flagship government schemes, ministries providing a comparative analysis of the funds allocated to them, or an independent agency to oversee appointments and transfers, seem somewhat out of touch with the challenges on the ground.

The information collected is impressive - the bibliography of each chapter even more so - but the book's overall approach is rather staid. Fresh, practical ideas are missing. The author does make references to institutions and best practices abroad, but not enough of them. The cover too appears designed to provoke, but fails to do so. Within, the typeface is cramped, making reading an arduous task.

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